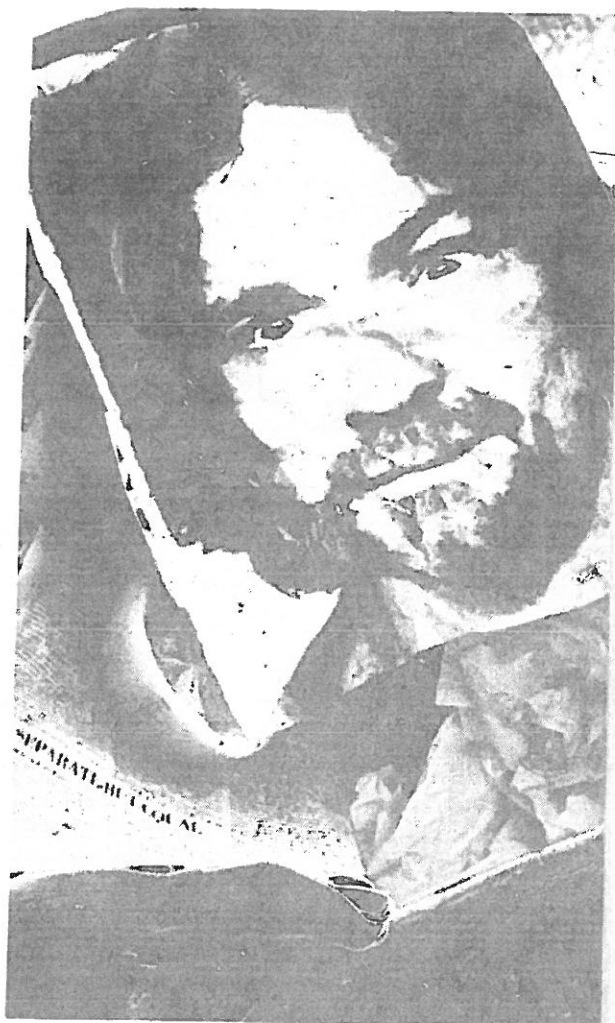




5 to die

by JERRY LeBLANC
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AN ORIGINAL HOLLOWAY HOUSE EDITION
HOLLOWAY HOUSE PUBLISHING CO.
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

001 Manson Family 88-307-3-70
Standard Book Number 87067-306-8

PUBLISHED BY:
Holloway House Publishing Company
8060 Melrose Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90046



DISTRIBUTED BY:
All America Distributors Corporation
8431 Melrose Place, Los Angeles, California 90069

FOR EUROPE:
A.B. Algemeen Boekbedrijf
Postbus 4134, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

FOR CANADA:
Cross Canada News, Limited
4490 Chesswood Drive #5
Downsview 462, Ontario

First Printing 1970

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Printed in the United States of America

Cover by Marshall Licht

Photographs by Cyril Maitland unless otherwise
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CONTENTS

10050 Cielo—The House on Heaven Street	9
Imitation of Death	31
The Family Makes The Scene	39
Rides on the Black Bus	57
The Crucifixion of Charlie	83
The Name of the Game—Dying	104
Chaos, Set to Music	123
Death Valley's Last Thrill	141
The Family's Breakup and a Cellmate's Confession	178
Murder Seven	214
They Were All Nice Kids, But	227
Drama In a Courtroom	246

complete control over the minds of a rag-tag bunch of adolescents. They were to be the instruments of a Grand Design. At LSD sessions, traveling in the bus, living in carefully concealed caves in the Santa Susana Mountains and in the desert, like some biblical prophet of old, he would gather his strange flock around him and read the Book of Revelations from the New Testament.

"The Bible is clear, the warnings have gone unheeded," he would say stroking the stubble of a beard he was beginning to grow. "The Day of Judgment is at hand."

And during the drug orgies he would read huge chunks from Revelations 9—about the destruction of man by locusts with the sting of scorpions.

Suddenly he closed the book and looked into the admiring eyes of his followers. They returned his fixed gaze.

"When this comes to pass," he said in a dramatic whisper, "Helter Skelter will be upon us. It's coming down fast."

It was as if The Family had been electrified by the very words. Hardly had Helter Skelter passed his lips than from a record player came the wailing voices of the Beatles.

And the song they were singing was "Helter Skelter."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Chaos, Set to Music

Two words were the signal: Helter Skelter. To the downtrodden and terrified members of The Family it meant only one thing, that the carnage and bloodshed prophesied by Charles Manson, their leader, their God, their Satan, had begun.

To most people, Helter Skelter was meaningless, but for The Family they were the trigger words, the very same Helter Skelter that the British pop group, the Beatles, sang about in one of their albums. For the Beatles it was just a song.

"Look out, Helter Skelter, Helter Skelter, Helter Skelter.

Look out, Helter Skelter, she's coming down fast.

Yes she is, yes she is."

Repetitive lyrics in a Beatle song album, but in the tormented mind of Charles Manson the song

was a battle cry, clarion call, the signal for the beginning of the end.

The Beatles album was Manson's satanic Bible. In their lyrics he read his future and what he considered was The Family's destiny. He juggled their words to suit him so that the Beatles' "Revolution" turned into a strange kind of Mein Kampf—and their tuneless songs became what sounded like a ghastly blueprint to take over the world.

In August of 1969 the word was quickly passed around—"Helter Skelter is here . . ." Manson himself 50 or 60 times a day would repeat and chant, "She's coming down fast . . . she's coming down fast."

The bill of goods he adopted and sold to his native tribe was this. The long haired Beatles were actually in on the plot, and as he saw it, death and destruction would become rampant in the world and when that happened the Beatles would abandon their luxurious homes in England and meet up with Manson and his band and they would all head for a secret promised land. Several times he even placed long distance phone calls to England—but never reached them. Whether Manson really believed this outrageous plan is not known but this was the kind of unbelievable doctrine that he programmed his Family to accept readily. What Manson told his followers he envisaged was complete revolution in America, wholesale slaughter, a race war with everyone outside The Family being wiped out and The Family taking over. Orchestrated chaos, with Beate lyrics.

124

Manson didn't like the black man and would have loved to see the Negro turn against his white brother in a race war. The white man would counterattack and go into the black ghettos and kill indiscriminately. Retaliations, countercattacks, vigilantes, barricades and wholesale blood baths would follow. Revolts, burning homes, massive destruction. While black was killing white The Family would stay out of it. In the dune buggies they had been accumulating—there even was a plan to mount the buggies with machine guns so The Family could defend themselves against the hordes—they would head for some safe, remote spot in the desert. And in preparation for Helter Skelter, The Family was already storing food and weapons. For more than a year various members had been sent off on Helter Skelter missions by Manson. Their main object was to build up secret caches of food and arms—most of which had been begged, stolen and in some cases bought.

Manson believed that the story of the destruction to come had been prophesied in its entirety in the biblical Book of Revelations and that the Beatles were party to the whole plan. In the Beate album that Manson had studied so assiduously, there is a song called Revolution 9. This Manson believed to refer to Revelations. Revolution 9 is a chaotic cacophony of dissonant sounds including machine gun fire, riots and some say oinking pigs.

Revelations Nine and the subsequent verses talks of a band of locusts descending upon the earth to torment man, wiping out all but sparing those who

125

have the seal of God on their foreheads, which presumably referred to The Family. The men leading this destruction are described as having "the faces of men and the hair of women," (this Manson took as a description of the long-haired Beatles), and they were to have "breastplates of iron"—that meant the Beatles' guitars.

Predictions of the coming black revolution were also referred to in the group's song "Blackbird," according to Manson. He interpreted that the Beatles' codeword for black militants was Blackbirds and chartered the racewar with lyrics like:

"Blackbird singing in the dead of the night,
Take these broken wings and learn to fly,
All your life,
You were only waiting for this moment to arrive."

The Beatles like himself, Manson felt, totally rejected the society around them. To them as well as to The Family society was a herd of pigs. The Beatles could get back at society by attacking it in their songs. Manson pointed to another song in the same album, "Piggies."*

"Have you seen the little piggies,
Crawling in the dirt,
And for all the little piggies,

*Copyright, Capitol Records, Inc.

126

Life is getting worse,
Always having dirt to play around in.

"Everywhere there's lots of piggies,
Living piggies' lives,
You can see them out for dinner,
With their piggie wives.

This song proved to Manson that the Beatles were in his camp. The ultimate condemnation of everything he resented and everything he taught his Family to hate. The rejection of middle class materialism and exploitation of the "have-nots." The Charles Manson who tried to have his songs published and recorded cultivated friends in prominent record industry places, who wanted to be recognized for the talent he thought he was, found it a comfort to have the society that rejected him, rejected in turn by no less successful a group than the world's foremost pop celebrities.

In August Manson sent an advance party of his Family to a section of California known as Death Valley. He had been there before, one year before, exactly. He had lived there for a short while, prospecting for gold and enjoying the utter seclusion of the wilderness that is untouched and unspoiled by progress and 20th century trappings.

So it was during a Southern California heatwave when the mercury jumped to 92°, the smog was heavy and the ozone count high, that Manson told Tex Watson, Linda Kasabian and another member,

127

Bruce Davis, to go in dune buggies to Death Valley to set up camp.

"Get the place ready for us," he told them as, at the dump, at the back of Spahn Ranch, The Family tuned up their flotilla of assorted cars, and rounded up the weapons they thought they needed. The women began sewing clothes suitable for chilly winter nights in the desert.

Manson spoke to his advance party on the day before departure. "Once the fighting begins, all hell will break loose," he declared. "But I will be there to lead you out of the chaos and confusion to the city under the earth."

The way he told it there was to be a paradise hideaway, unlit by either the sun or the moon. He rhapsodised about the imaginary haven. "It's fed by a river and milk and honey. It has bountiful supplies of fruits and trees that change their fruit every month."

And The Family listened, spellbound. No one knew exactly how they would get there or where the entrance to this Utopia was, but Manson pointed out that the clues were there in Beatle songs again. Like "Yellow Submarine" and Ringo's "Sea of Holes." And the Beatles would arrive themselves to show them the way.

Then for confirmation, he opened his Bible and from Revelations Two he read of a new city with a bejewelled foundation: "And the city had no need of sun, neither of the moon to shine in it. For the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day for there shall be no night there. The streets of the city were

pure gold and every one of the twelve gates was of pearl." . . . "In the midst of the street was the tree of life which bore twelve manner of fruits and yielded the fruit every month." That then was Manson's dream which incredibly enough he managed to convey to his young followers and make them believe in it implicitly.

But besides using the Beatles' lyrics as a credo for his Family, there were the songs he and The Family members composed and sang at gatherings and orgies. But instead of charting the future, Manson used them as part of an overall indoctrination plan, to bend his proteges more effectively to his will. One song, "Cease to Exist," which Manson wrote in 1968 expounded his philosophy that in order to really live one had to cease to exist, or die, and thereafter, being free of the body, could really live again spiritually. Therefore, it was not a crime to kill since by doing so one released one's victims from the limits imposed by physical life and sent them on to a real, meaningful existence. It was also effective propaganda from Manson's point of view because it produced a body of followers who did not fear to die themselves and were, therefore, virtually invincible.

The song's wailing chant which Manson started was taken up by other members of the commune at their regular "Family Jams" which went on for hours in the form of never-ending rounds. The gist of the song went . . .